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FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN COMMUNIST CHINA

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN COMMUNIST CHINA

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I. REVOLUTIONARY METHODS OF TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

AT THE SHANGHAI ACADEMY

5 May 1960
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Unsigned article

Holding aloft the red flag of Maoism, the Shanghai Academy of Foreign Languages has made an energetic effort to revise its teaching program, thereby achieving noticeable progress in its academic standard and gathering significant experience. The academy has made a critical analysis of the examination papers and phonetic recordings of its students. It was ascertained that sophomores in the Department of Russian Language Studies had overtaken and exceeded the standard of foreign language facility reported for its graduates, after 4 years of study, in 1958.

The following are a few instances of analysis and comparison. In composition, the sophomores can now write an essay (on such topics as "Educational Revolution") of an average length of some 3,000 printed symbols in two class periods. Some students' compositions run as long as 4,000 printed symbols. Most students can develop the topic with relative ease, relate the same with reality, and demonstrate a strong sense of logic. In some outstanding cases, not only is the composition flawless but the content is impressive. In 1958, the graduating "A" students, after 4 years of study, could write some 2,600 printed symbols in 3 hours on such a topic as "Supporting the Antimperialist Struggle of the Middle and Near East Peoples;" the content was found to be quite ordinary, lacking in logic, without much coherence, and with much repetition. In translation, the sophomores can now translate, as in their exercises from Chinese to Russian, an average of 480 Chinese characters of ordinary political texts in two class periods, with an average of five linguistic errors and three rhetorical errors. The graduates of the 1958 class could translate an average of only 246 Chinese characters of similar texts in two class periods, with an average of two linguistic errors and four rhetorical errors. In speaking, the "A" students in the sophomore class can now, with no more than 5 minutes' preparation, write out an outline of a speech in Chinese on such a topic as "Teaching Experiment" and then speak without pause for 32 minutes. The substance of the speech is found to reflect imagination, logic, correct viewpoint, vivid expressiveness, and general linguistic facility; there is variety in the structure of 116 sentences, including 57 compound sentences and 59 simple sentences. The language is fluent, with very few major mistakes. The "A" graduates in the 1958 class would spend 2 hours writing out a draft speech in Russian and then speak continuously for 5 minutes. The content was found to reflect good organization, correct viewpoint, and mirrored reality; of the 28 sentences, 21 were simple

sentences, seven were compound sentences, and only one was a compound sentence of high order. The structure of the sentences was relatively simple; the pronunciation was good, but the delivery was not fluent enough; there were no major mistakes.

There has been noticeable progress also in the teaching of English and German, among other specializations. For instance, the sophomores majoring in English can generally understand 65 percent of the "Peiping English Broadcast"; "A" students can understand up to 90 percent. In speaking, the sophomores can speak continuously some 400 words in 5 minutes; their pronunciation is fundamentally correct; their delivery is fluent; and their expressions are idiomatic, without serious mistakes.

All these accomplishments have been possible, because the academy has, in the course of foreign-language teaching reforms during the past 2 years, held aloft the red flag of Maoism and faithfully implemented the education program. Under the guidance of Maoism, and as a result of its scientific research, it has correctly solved many important theoretical problems in the teaching of foreign languages, e.g., "language and politics," "language and thought," "the all-national nature of language and class characteristics in the use of language," "the relation of linguistic theory to linguistic realities," etc., thereby determining the direction in which the teaching of foreign languages is to be revised. Among its basic experiences in raising the quality of the teaching of foreign languages in accordance with the principle of "quality, quantity, economy, and speed" are the following:

1. "Modernization of course content." During the past 2 years, it has gradually established a new system of textual materials in modern foreign languages. The major objectives of this system are: to make the textual materials serve the political interests of the proletariat; to achieve modernization; to emphasize the present rather than the past; and to coordinate theory with practice. Prior to the educational revolution, there were various tendencies toward deviation in the materials used for foreign-language teaching, e.g., "emphasizing the language at the expense of thought," "emphasizing literature at the expense of politics," "emphasizing the past rather than the present," and "isolating theory from practice." The textual materials consisted in nothing but pure literature, and mostly the literary works of the bourgeoisie of the 18th and 19th centuries, which were very harmful to the thinking of the students. Many of the linguistic phenomena could not meet the demands of modern standards and could hardly be used in actual work. In the course of the educational revolution, the broad masses of students and teachers have under the leadership of the Party done much construction as well as dismantlement. They have destroyed the old system of course materials. They have resolutely followed the principle of "politics first and art second." Political essays have thus occupied an important place in the course materials.

Thus, the substance of the textual materials is closely related to our current political life. The language of the textual materials adheres to the modern standard. These textual materials have enabled the students not only to receive a Communist ideological education but also to fully grasp foreign languages as instruments of struggle. Our experience during the past 2 years has fully proved that it is far better and more beneficial to use as textual material selected literary works of the classical Marxist-Leninist writers, the writings of chairman Mao, and other proletarian writers, than to use the writings of Shakespeare and Dickens--whether in terms of ideology or in linguistic terms. Such revision of the textual material used in foreign-language teaching has had a decisive effect on the improvement of the quality of foreign-language teaching.

2. "Intensive exercises--'open the mouth'; 'use the hands.'"

Foreign languages are social instruments. For social purposes, one must achieve fluency in both the spoken and written forms of languages. Therefore, in learning foreign languages, one must, under the guidance of theory, engage in actual exercises by opening one's mouth (speaking) and using one's hands (writing). Such practical exercises include speaking, writing, reading, listening, and translating. These five phases represent not only the objectives of teaching but also the means to these ends. In order to allow the students enough time for such practical exercises, we must raise the quality of teaching and reduce the lecturing period to the minimum, so that the student can be induced to participate in classroom practice to the maximum. We should not only do so in the classroom, we should also create various conditions outside the classrooms for all phases of practical exercise, e.g., organize conversational groups; hold meetings of celebration; sponsor public-speaking and translation sessions; publish blackboard papers, wall papers, and periodicals; etc.

3. "Making full use of electronic equipment in teaching."

During the past year, the Shanghai Foreign-Language Academy has used such facilities as radio broadcasts, phonographs, recording machines, photo-slides, motion pictures, and simultaneous-translation equipment in classroom teaching, after-class activities, scientific research, and the program for the advanced training of teachers. In classroom teaching it has used recording machines and phonographs for the analysis of phonetic sounds and tones; the recording machines in place of reading aloud by teachers; and photo-slides and simultaneous-translation equipment to actively strengthen the thinking process of the students and thus improve their practical ability. Electronic equipment can be even more widely and variously used in after-class activities, e.g., listening to radio broadcasts, installing talking blackboard papers, building telephone communication networks, showing foreign-language movies, etc. Teachers may use the students' recordings to learn how to improve their pattern of linguistic teaching; they may use the recording machines and

phonographs to cultivate their own ability in the differentiation of phonetic sounds and to improve their own linguistic fluency. During the past year, the Shanghai Foreign-Language Academy has taken the preliminary steps toward the establishment of a system of electronic facilities for teaching.

4. "Training teachers in accordance with the principle of 'quality, quantity, economy, and speed.'" The continuous improvement of the standard of teachers is an important key to the improvement of the quality of teaching. The academy has achieved significant results in the training of teachers. Older teachers are relatively few in the academy. At present, the great majority of the courses are taught by young teachers. This is particularly true in the Department of Russian Language Studies, where all basic (practical) courses--from the freshman to the senior year--are taught by young teachers, thanks to the Party-sponsored training program, the assistance of Soviet experts, and their enriched teaching experience. In addition, these young teachers have offered four new courses in theory. The results have been good. They give maximum attention to the serious problems arising from the current method of teaching foreign languages and conduct scientific research accordingly. For instance, they review their teaching experience, compile textual materials, prepare reference works, etc. All these activities have a positive effect on the improvement of the quality of teaching, as well as its theoretical standard.

The experience of the Shanghai Foreign-Language Academy in improving the quality of teaching has attracted the attention of all interested parties. Between 23 and 24 April, the Bureau of Higher Education of the Shanghai Municipality called a symposium on foreign-language teaching at the academy. Those who attended the symposium included the foreign-language teachers of all schools at the college level, and some secondary schools and secondary vocational schools. At the meeting, emphasis was placed on emphasizing the experience of the Shanghai Foreign-Language Academy in improving its quality of foreign-language teaching.

II. NEW SYSTEM OF TEACHING RUSSIAN AT THE PEIPING ACADEMY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Unsigned article

Under the guidance of Maoism and adopting the spirit of the General Line, the Department of Russian Language Studies of the Peiping Academy of Foreign Languages has drastically revised the teaching of elementary courses, abandoned the old system of specialized training, and established the new system of unified training. The experience of the past 2 years has proved that the new system does meet the demand for raising the students' actual fluency in Russian in accordance with the principle of "quality, quantity, economy, and speed."

One of the major problems relative to the teaching of foreign languages, as revealed in the course of the educational revolution in 1958, was the general tendency to overemphasize the theoretical knowledge of languages and to neglect the practical command of languages. The system of specialized training, as then adopted by the department, further encouraged the tendency toward theorization of the subject matter and thus proved an obstacle to any satisfactory solution of the problem of theory versus practice in the teaching of foreign languages. For such a system artificially divides unified language training into three parts, viz., pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, and these three phases are often taught by different instructors. These instructors were often concerned only with their respective phases of training and tended to unduly emphasize the "systemic nature" and "comprehensiveness" of these individual phases, thus resulting in the lack of organic relationship between these phases. The students were objectively urged to spend much time memorizing the many linguistic rules, but they could not achieve reasonable ease in the actual application of the language, viz., understanding, speaking, writing, and reading. This was particularly true in the use of the spoken language. In the 1958 educational revolution, the instructors and the students established, in accordance with the law governing the actual mastery of the language, a new system of unified teaching, thereby offering an effective method for the satisfactory solution of the problem of theory versus practice.

The system of unified teaching is based on the Marxist linguistic philosophy, which recognizes the three elements of language. Under the previous system of specialized teaching, the relative independence of the three elements, i.e., pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, was deemed as absolute, and their dialectical unity and organic relationship were neglected. Under the system of unified teaching, these three constituent elements are recognized as a whole;

a unified set of teaching outlines and textual materials are used; and all three phases are taught by the same instructor--thereby contributing to the actual mastery of a unified, living language. The unified textual materials are based on the requirements for actual mastery of the language. The materials on pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary are organically put together. While attention is directed to the peculiar features of these three phases, their organic relationship and interaction are fully reflected. At the same time, the unified application of these three phases of learning is recognized. In the text and unified exercises of every lesson, these three phases are treated as a whole. On this basis, the students are able to acquire an all-round knowledge of both the spoken and written forms of the language. Under this system, the problem of theory versus practice in language teaching is solved and the bourgeois tendency to overemphasize theory at the expense of practice is fundamentally arrested. They have thus mapped out a new path in the teaching of foreign languages, which closely associates theory with practice and which assures "quality, quantity, economy, and speed."

Under the leadership of the Party Committee of the academy and the General Party Branch of the Department of Russian Language Studies, this new system of teaching has during the past 2 years increasingly demonstrated its superiority and won the enthusiastic support of instructors and students alike. It is to be noted, however that in the course of implementing the new system a struggle between the two roads was also reflected. At first, some people emphasized the difficulties in foreign-language teaching, maintaining that it could proceed in separate phases, "slowly" and "step by step." They were sentimental about the old system, preferring the road contrary to "quality, quantity, economy, and speed." There were also some people who lacked faith in the implementation of the new system, maintaining that there were not enough trained instructors and proposing to wait 3 to 5 years before the adoption of the new system. Actually, these arguments represented only a form of conservative tendency. Under the leadership of the Party, free expression and debate were encouraged among the instructors and students; it was recognized that the system of teaching must be reformed. In the course of implementing the new system, discussions were continuously held, with a view to unifying thinking, as well as understanding and continuously improving the new system.

The experience during the past two years has proved that the system of unified teaching not only conforms to the objective law governing the actual mastery of a language but also fully develops the people's subjective capacity. Since one instructor is responsible for the over-all teaching of pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, his sense of responsibility is greatly strengthened. Since he is responsible for the over-all progress of the students, the function of the instructor as a source of guidance is fully developed. In another respect, since the subject matter is

determined in accordance with the requirements for actual mastery of a language and the various phases of teaching are designed to contribute to the mastery of a unified language, the training in over-all command of the language has been greatly strengthened. The students are thus no longer required to simply memorize grammatical rules. Whatever knowledge he has absorbed may thus be used, immediately and broadly, in classroom exercises, both in the spoken and written forms of the language, thereby fully developing initiative. According to a recent survey: Since the adoption of unified teaching, students in the freshman and sophomore classes have learned 4,700 words; whereas under the system of specialized teaching, they could learn no more than 3,500 or 4,000 words. Previously the phase on grammar called for 596 hours of teaching in 3 years; whereas under the new system, it requires only 240 hours, in 2 years. Most important of all, the students' actual fluency in language has been greatly improved. Since the adoption of unified teaching, the students have made significant progress in speaking, writing, understanding, and reading.

The experience during the past 2 years has shown that by adopting the system of unified teaching, one may speedily fulfill the task of teaching elementary Russian in 2 years, instead of 3 years as previously, thus shortening the time required for teaching elementary Russian. In turn, this will have a beneficial effect on the teaching of advanced courses, dictate a change in the old system, and raise academic standards. Thus the over-all leap forward in the teaching of the Russian language is facilitated.

The system of unified teaching also serves the function of accelerating the training of instructors and raising their standards. Under the system of specialized teaching, each instructor was concerned with only one phase of a language, and it was likely that his scope of knowledge would become narrower and narrower and that he could hardly improve himself in the mastery of a language. Since the adoption of unified teaching, the instructors can achieve over-all progress in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. The 40 instructors responsible for unified teaching in the department are all very young; some of them did not graduate until 1956. Under the leadership of the Party, they have courageously accepted the challenge. By participating in such activities as collective preparation, public teaching, and reference teaching and by engaging in independent research, one instructor can be equal to the task of teaching pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary previously undertaken by three instructors.

Presently, the Department of Russian Language Studies of the Peiping Academy of Foreign Languages is making an over-all review of its experience in unified teaching, under the guidance of chairman Mao's thought. Moreover, on the basis of a full analysis of the students' subjective capacity, it is rewriting the textual materials for unified teaching, with a view to further raising

standards in the elementary phase of teaching. In order to better demonstrate the function of unified teaching and to quickly increase the students' ability to master the Russian language, the department is also trying to make full use of electronic and technical equipment in classroom teaching and in after-class activities.

III. KWANGSI UNIVERSITY STRESSES READING AND TRANSLATION OF THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE

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Unsigned article

The Public Russian Study Group of Kwangsi University has launched an energetic educational reform movement and has faithfully carried out the reading-translation method of teaching, thereby contributing much to raising academic standards.

The reading-translation method of teaching is designed to raise the general level of the students' active knowledge, in terms of pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, through extensive reading and translation, to the end that they may be able to read and translate political and technical writings in Russian with relative ease. The textual materials consist of those Russian books or writings that reflect the latest knowledge in the social and natural sciences.

Since the adoption of the reading-translation method was first proposed, it has met with the general approval of instructor and students of all departments at the academy. A high tide of enthusiasm for Russian studies has appeared. In the course of teaching, the instructors first emphasize pronunciation, and, having solved the difficulties in pronunciation, attack the weak points in grammar, e.g., the morphology of nouns and verbs. By doing so, they help the students surmount these difficulties, thereby laying a solid foundation for the successful implementation of the reading-translation method of teaching.

According to a statistical survey of the first 6 weeks' experience in adopting the reading-translation method, the "slow class" sophomores in the Department of Mathematics have already overtaken their "quick class" classmates, and since the two classes were merged in the translation course they have demonstrated similar speed and quality in the translation of the same texts. In the Departments of Civil Engineering, Electrical Engineering, and Chemical Engineering, the volume of translations has been increased to 700 printed Russian symbols per class period, in contrast to the teaching volume of some 400 printed Russian symbols in the last semester. As a result of extensive practice, the students have made significant progress in reading and translating. For instance, the sophomores in the Department of Mathematics have collectively translated such books as Electrical Engineering and Introduction to Calculus Geometry, and, in addition, the department has accepted the task of translating the monthly periodical Selected Articles on Dynamics. As a result of the adoption of the new method, students in the Department of Metallurgy have increased their vocabulary from 12 words per class period in the last semester to 25, and their comprehension of Russian texts has advanced

from 40 percent in the last semester to over 80 percent. The sophomores in the Department of Electrical Engineering, after 2 weeks' training under the new system, proved capable of translating 1,500 printed Russian symbols per class period, in contrast to the reading capacity of only 800 printed Russian symbols per class period in the last semester.

Recently, the Public Russian Study Group of Kwangsi University made a preliminary review of the adoption of the reading-translation method. They have found the following advantages:

- 1) Combining the features of public Russian instruction, this method has solved the contradiction between the heavy burden of course work in various departments of science and engineering and the lack of time for self-study; by closely integrating the various phases of teaching, e.g., preparation, lecture, classroom work, review, and guidance, this method has proved to be highly efficient.
- 2) Since the textual materials consist of such "live material" as Russian books and writings that reflect the latest knowledge in the social and natural sciences, the problem of selecting textual materials is fundamentally solved. The common denominator of these textual materials is their close association with the current class and production struggle. This will definitely contribute to the continued enhancement of the political awakening of both instructors and students, and to the continued improvement of their professional standards.
- 3) It may lead to the close coordination between Russian-language teaching and professional training, thereby refuting the superstitious belief that "technical books are difficult to swallow."
- 4) This method insists on extensive practice, in full compliance with the rules and characteristics of Russian-language studies.